

Prepared Statement of Chairman Sherwood Boehlert

Markup of H.R. 3970, H.R. 3980 and H.R. 4030

March 31, 2004

I want to welcome everyone here for our markup this morning. As usual, we are moving forward with bills that are bipartisan and moderate--bills that will help make a difference in people's lives in very real ways. I'm especially pleased that two of the bills were introduced by freshman Members--Dr. Gingrey and Mr. Neugebauer. We hope that all of these bills will be able to move through the House before the May recess, although the wind bill must go to another committee.

As is our practice, I'm going to talk about the bills now and let the sponsors describe them in greater detail when we get to the markup of each bill.

I want to congratulate Mr. Neugebauer and Mr. Moore for coming up with an affordable, targeted version of this wind bill. Windstorms cause much avoidable loss of life and property. We need a program for wind, like the one we have for earthquakes, that targets federal R&D resources toward developing ways for buildings to better withstand windstorms. That's exactly what this bill will create.

I want to congratulate Chairman Smith and Ms. Johnson on their bill to create an award for businesses that help our nation's schools. This is clearly an activity we want to see increase, and this award will provide an additional incentive. The bill is inspired in part by the very successful Baldrige Award program that this committee created.

I want to take most of my time this morning to talk about Dr. Gingrey's green chemistry bill because that's what this morning's debates will center on.

First let me say that this bill is exactly the kind of thing this committee should be doing--making sure that federal R&D programs give enough attention to important research that could advance national needs. The Federal Government has long had a smattering of green chemistry programs and even a Presidential award, but we've lacked a sustained, focused and priority effort in this important area. This bill is designed to change that.

The bill has attracted a surprisingly large number of amendments. I take that as a sign that we have hit on an important issue--one that has been previously neglected. So the amendments, in that sense, are a good sign.

Unfortunately, we are going to have to oppose these amendments in their current form, even though I always try to be open to others' ideas and to look for grounds for compromise. We may yet reach some compromises this morning, and we will be offering substitutes for some amendments so that we can get at least some of the ideas behind them into the bill.

So what's wrong with the amendments? Well, the amendments fall into three categories. Several aim to increase the spending in this bill. While I'm sympathetic to the need to spend more on this program, we have a fiscal crisis, and both sound policy and sound politics dictate that we not make the program more expensive. Hopefully, we will be able to spend more on green chemistry in later years.

The second category of amendment aims to elaborate on activities already explicitly or implicitly permitted in the bill.

We don't want to weigh the bill down with very prescriptive program language, but we are willing to go somewhat farther than the introduced bill does in describing what kinds of activities might be funded through the green chemistry program. I hope we can reach agreement on these amendments.

The third category of amendment is the most problematic; these amendments would change the nature of this bill from one focused on R&D to one that is more regulatory in nature. This bill's purpose is straight-forward and non-controversial; we're trying to create an R&D program that will generate new ideas.

If we add regulatory or procurement provisions, this bill will become controversial and will be referred to other committees, and we will have nothing to show for our efforts. I'm sympathetic to some of these ideas, but this bill is not the proper vehicle for them.

If, prompted by this bill, Members are now interested in taking other actions related to green chemistry, then they should introduce their own bills and we can decide how to proceed on them. But we shouldn't be turning an R&D bill into a complex and controversial procurement and regulatory measure. If this bill doesn't pass, there will be fewer green chemistry ideas to get companies and the government to implement.

So I hope we can have a collegial and productive markup today. I don't think there is any controversy on the underlying bills. I'm pleased that Members want to expand these bills further, but we can't expand so much that they won't fit into the House schedule.

Mr. Gordon.